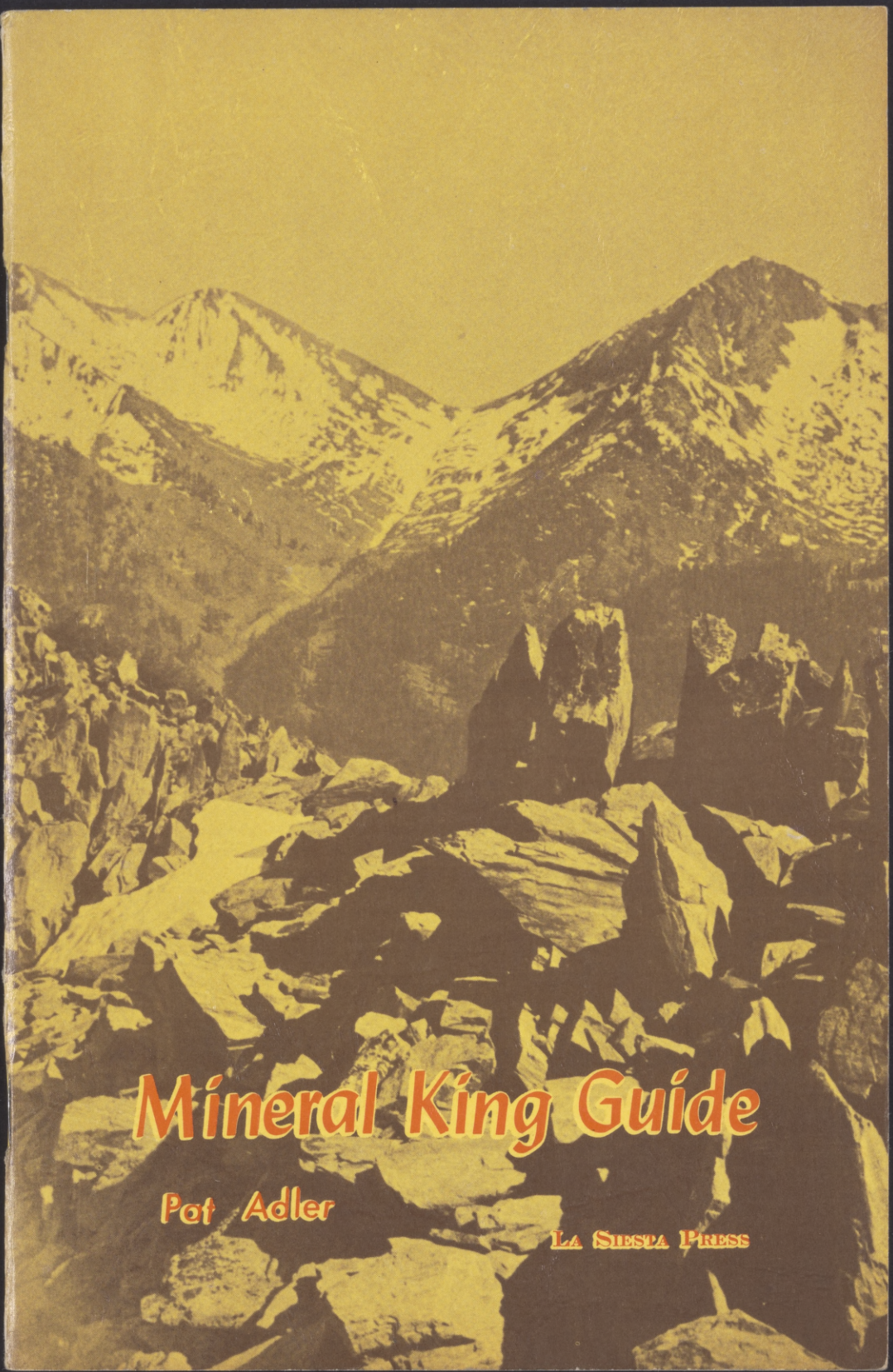

Mineral King Guide

Pat Adler

La Siesta Press

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1401 - 41st St.
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Mineral King Guide

revised edition

by

Pat Adler

revision by

Walt Wheelock

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Box 406

Glendale, Calif.

A climbing manual is not a substitute for climbing practice or skill. Proper equipment will tend to make rockclimbs safer, but only if safety policies are always practiced. It is urged that inexperienced mountaineers will avail themselves of the instruction and guidance that the climbing groups of our various mountaineering clubs are so willing to supply to serious students of the climbing arts.

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The information in the following pages has been gathered from many sources. Marilyn and Bill DeCarteret, genial operators of the Mineral King Pack Station, contributed much from their knowledge of the trails and the lore of the valley. Tom Porter of the College of the Sequoias placed at our disposal his unpublished manuscript on the Silver Rush at Mineral King. Dr. Mark Christensen of the Department of Geology, University of California, who has just published an important study of the geology of Mineral King, read this section, making helpful comments.

In addition to the listed books on the subject, the files of *Westways* and the *Sierra Club Bulletin* yielded material of value. The manuscript file of Bancroft Library was completely searched for rare, unpublished source materials. Norman Clyde, John Robinson, and Frank Sanborn, who have made numerous climbs in this region, were consulted on the routes to the peaks.

Finally, thanks to Walt Wheelock of La Siesta Press for the careful and preceptive editing, and his work of designing this publication.

P.A.

For assistance in this revision we thank Jean Koch and Burton Peterson of the Mineral King Task Force, Melvin Lieurance and Bill Deisman of the USFS and John Palmer and Gail Bennett of the NPS.

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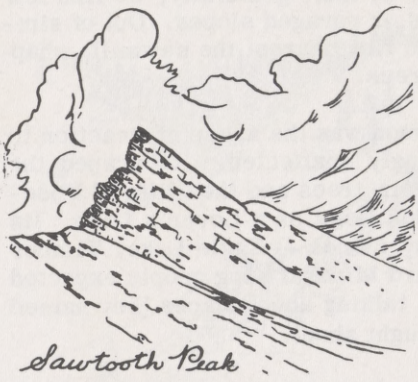
cover photo by Pat Adler



Introduction

EVERY DAYDREAM of a mountain vacation should include a valley as tranquil and perfect as Mineral King. Whether the dreamer is a mountaineer, a connoisseur of loafing, or a woman who knows her dishpan and skillet must surely follow her, this is an ideal resting place. And it has always been good to dreamers. When the excitement of silver and gold played over the Sierra Nevada like summer lightning, Mineral King gave it a ten-year-long welcome within its colorful walls. The one-time prospectors kept coming back for, unlike many another bonanza-built hopeful, their Mineral King was too lovely to leave. Then their families came, and other people, with a wider dream than finding ore. Now, in all this most populous state, the rarest treasure may well be serenity. Those who dream of it come here. It is a sanctuary, one of dwindling few.

Mineral King forms a balcony high along the Great Western Divide. Storms driving landward from the Pacific sweep across California to this first great rampart of the Sierra. Falling to the west of this dividing ridge, rain and snow return, after a lingering delay in snow fields and alpine lakes, to the streams of the Great Central Valley and westward to the sea. The ridges encircling Mineral King, and the summits — Empire Mountain, Sawtooth, and Florence Peak — send down their streams to make up the headwaters of the East Fork of the Kaweah.

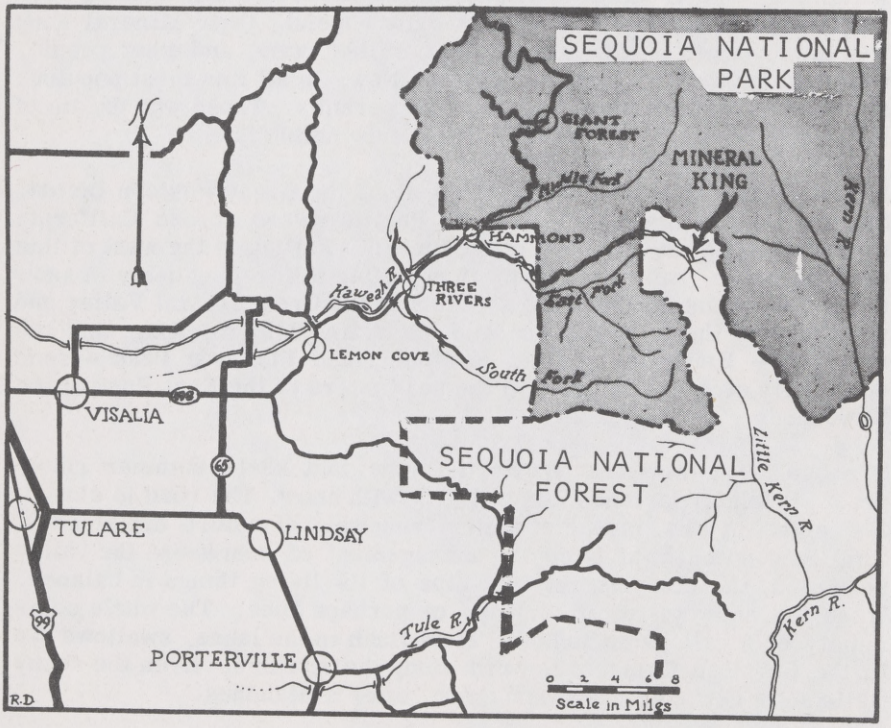
The bounty of the Great Western Divide that keeps summer richly green, in winter lavishes Mineral King with snow. The road is closed. For eight months, only the ancient renewals of nature are at work. This long withdrawal from the management of men keeps the valley unspoiled, the complex relationships of its living things in balance. When the snow yields it is May, or perhaps June. The whole community of small game is busy, trout flash in the lakes, swallows dip to the terraced fields of flowers along the streams. Even the rocky walls show new color here and there, after avalanches.

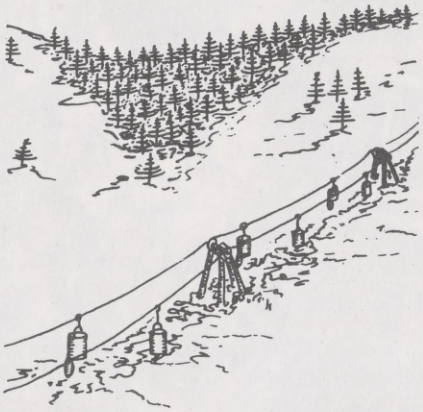
Mineral King Valley
photo by Bruton Peterson

Mineral King has inspired a rare affection throughout the hundred years of its history. Letters written by the miners long before conservation became popular show a concern for its natural beauty. These men treated their valley well, so that, gratefully, we find few traces of their logging, no tall stumps or ravaged slopes. Out of simple affection they spared the noble red firs nearest the sawmill, shaping their mine timbers from lesser trees.

During the 1880's, when a genteel swoon was the accepted reaction to scenery, Mineral King was refreshingly unaffected. It escaped the sentimental tags wished on the sequoia trees and the cliffs of Yosemite. There's not even an Inspiration Point or a Lover's Leap. Its features come to us with Indian-easy names — Eagle Lake, Timber Gap, Iron Spring. The straightforward Mineral King people expected always to spend their summers here, talking about places they named and living with every change they brought about.

Nature in Mineral King is not spectacular, not on the grand scale — but it has a certain beauty. It is a place to spend a happy summer — to remember — to return —





History

THE STORY of Mineral King ought to begin with the Indian, his campfire and summer lean-to beneath the fir trees, the valley abounding in game. Although no certain evidence of encampments or frequent hunts has come to light, the Western Mono tribes are known to have lived in villages along the Upper Kaweah and undoubtedly followed game into the highlands in dry years. Related in language to the Owens Valley Paiute, these tribes were probably a Shoshonean people from the east who, at some time in the past, pushed across the crest of the Sierra.

The white man's map of the Sierra, after a century of confused rendering, began to emerge through the systematic explorations of Josiah Whitney. The California survey party of 1864 reached the main Sierra crest and took the measure of its highest peaks. The discovery of Mineral King was recorded that same summer, although not by the Geological Survey.

The Union Army was building the Hockett Trail from Three Rivers eastward across the range to Fort Independence. Harry O'Farrell, a meat hunter with the trail crew, climbed into Farewell Gap and saw the valley before him. It teemed with bear and deer, suiting his purpose admirably, but it held more than momentary appeal for him. He returned regularly to hunt and to be alone. Perhaps his quest for solitude was an after-effect of the prison term he had served, for which he was called "Harry Parole." Whatever his motives, he soon put an end to his privacy by boasting of his secret hunting ground amid the rainbow mountains.

Among others, Joseph W. Lovelace came deer hunting in 1871 and made the first ascent of Sawtooth Peak. Inspired by what he saw, he too returned. Two years later he had thrown a crude fence across the western outlet, near present Faculty Flats, and was using the whole valley as a cow pasture.

One of the real dreamers of Mineral King was J. A. Crabtree, a devout spiritualist, who worked a farm near Porterville. He was sought in his sleep by the spirit of an Indian promising him great wealth if he would follow directions. Crabtree set out at once for the mountains, taking a neighbor with him. Approaching Mineral King from the south via White Chief Bowl, they found a rich vein of ore. The White Chief Claim was staked July 25, 1873.

But this was not the first claim staked in the valley. The previous summer Harry Parole, following a wounded deer on Empire Mountain, had recognized coloring which he took to be a well-defined mineral deposit. When he encountered the same coloring in Monarch Canyon he staked his claim and resolved to have another look at Empire Mountain — some day.

Crabtree and his neighbor were not so casual. Discreetly recruiting four friends in Porterville, they came back to the valley. In September, after two of the men had located new claims, they formed a mining district, Mineral King. On their return to Porterville, they found the rumor of their strike already well reported in the press and the public waiting, wild-eyed and frenzied, for details.

And so the rush was on. Harry Parole got word of it in time to stake his Empire Claim. A Visalia reporter wrote, "Porterville is all in a ferment. Everybody struck rich, some in embryo and some full-blown," and Visalia turned out. Her ex-mayor, Wiley Watson, collected a buggy-full of samples and began to extole Mineral King, planning Visalia would be its sponsor. Men arrived from the foothill towns of Excelsior, Elbow, Kaweah. Of the 93 prospectors filing claims, three-fourths were Tulare County men.

Then the snows came. It was a glorious winter, 1873. Not just a few bemused prospectors, but the whole countryside to whom they returned *knew* a fortune was waiting, nestled beneath the snow. It was sweet even to talk about the obstacles, for what difficulties of mining or transport were really insurmountable where the assay reports promised three and four hundred dollars per ton of ore?

Local newspapers were in the vanguard. What the Territorial Enterprise of Virginia City had done for the Comstock Lode, they would do for Mineral King, which was Greater-than-the-Comstock.

The *Tulare Times*, April 25, 1874, proclaimed "Ho, For The Mines." But it was a little premature. Miners following the snow line reported "only five feet" at Harry's Bend by May 7. Then it stormed. One party retreated along the river and founded Silver City while they waited for the ground to clear.

Old Atwell Mill
Bruton Peterson collection

When finally the men could work their claims there began a frenzy of pickaxe and shovel breaking. Pits were blasted with much burning of black powder or even with primitive techniques of firing and quenching the stubborn rock. Boulders rolled down upon the settlement in such numbers the Mining District meeting ruled that every man must keep his rocks on his own land. By the summer's end, the miners looked at their puny coyote-hole mines and were forced to admit their dreams demanded capital.

They rejoiced at the coming of the New England Tunnel and Smelter Company (in June 1875), giving it their support as it began to buy up claims. Having accepted payment in shares of company stock, the miners grumbled as assessments were made against those shares, forcing sales in which the stock migrated to a few buyers — the board of directors. A toll road was actually built, a smelter set up, and a roaster for the ore, although from such thin metal it "caved in like a squashed pumpkin" when it was fired. The hasty operation was brief. For the tyro mining engineers, these mines had, from the first, been more a matter of faith than geology. The board of directors were not amateur. One of the members, William M. Stewart, Nevada's cascade-bearded silver senator, had learned in the Comstock and practiced at Panamint. White Chief was yielding no easy bonanza. Faith was for the local prospectors. The New England Tunnel and Smelter Company, pronouncing the ore "rebellious", liquidated by autumn 1877.

A heart-breaking year without capital — then Tom Fowler came out of Visalia to more than match its faith, make enough noise to attract San Francisco loans, and provide flamboyant headlines for the press.

With his Irish exuberance, Tom Fowler announced there was treasure enough in his Mineral King property — the Empire Claim — to pay off the national debt, buy Ireland from Queen Victoria, or build a palace on San Francisco's Nob Hill.

The miners were delirious and the merchants, in what was elsewhere a near-depression year, encouraged the flurry of activity. Fowler started a tunnel into the natural cavern on the Empire Claim, then another one. while machinery for his 100-stamp mill was being packed up the road. Hallidie, of San Francisco cable-car fame, built the tramway.

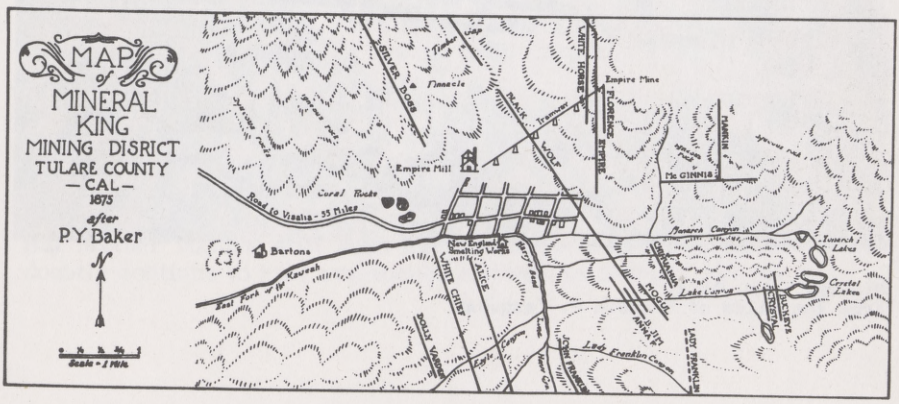
With his miners working in three shifts, Fowler was spending all the money he had or could borrow. Bankrupt, plagued by avalanches that swept away the bunk house and part of the tramway, he finally carried one bar of bullion into Visalia, July 1880. Before the celebration was decently begun, rumors spread of the disappointingly high lead content in the 107 pound ingot.

Tom Fowler went back to his former career — politics — leaving to his creditors the Empire operations. The miners, who had faith, still told each other that if the ore could be treated before it was smelted, surely their fortunes would be made.

Mineral King was never to produce another bullion bar. The winter of 1873-74 was severe. Depression gripped San Francisco and left no capital for investment in dreams. When the miners returned in the spring, they brought their families, planted gardens, tried a little fishing. No one repaired the rusting tramway or the snow-crushed roof of the abandoned mill.

Just as the settlement never became a real wide-open mining camp, it never became a ghost town. It hadn't attained the gaities of Bodie or the cheerful and lethal mood of Panamint. Its "christening" came after six summers of mining, and then, neither gunfighter was extensively ventilated. Prosaically, when the bunk house at the White Chief was demolished by a snow slide, the one woman rousted out of bed was the loyal wife of the superintendent. Alongside the assay office there were bakeshops and a barber shop. George Washington Boone, reputedly a grandson of Dan'l, set up as meat hunter for the district, but there was a townish butcher shop and grocery store as well.

From a population of 300, Mineral King declined to a few dozen families keeping up the old cabins clustered around the general store and post office. At the turn of the century the Mt. Whitney Power and Electric Co. constructed an hydroelectric plant near Three Rivers, utilizing the waters of the Kaweah. To limit spring runoff, dams of native rock masonary were built in 1904-05 at Monarch, Franklin,



Crystal and Eagle lakes. Yearly, the control valves are opened at successive lakes to assure an even flow of water. The dams have never been overtopped, maintaining together a storage of about 1200 acre feet, now under the supervision of the Southern California Edison Company.

In the *flivver era*, Mineral King was a vacation camp for the sporting motorist. *Touring Topics* of August 1924 describes the road as very good, the accomodations as first-rate, and the scenery as some of the best in the Wonder West. From a later group of sportsmen, the skiers, Mineral King draws even grander praise. Tulare County, the U.S. Forest Service, and the California Ski Association cooperated on a winter survey in 1947-48, announcing the valley has superlative ski terrain, adequate snowfall, excellent protection from winds, and moderate winter temperatures. The Sierra Club concurred, calling it probably the most spectacular site on the west slope of the Sierra. Commercial development is unlikely at the present, not only because of its frequent avalanches, but due to the high cost of an all-weather road and facilities.

Mineral King, 1892.
From the files of Francis P. Farquhar

AVALANCHES

The passing years have continued to bear out the previous remarks about frequent avalanches. Cabin owners often returned to find a VW-sized rock in the middle of their cabins.

When Disney Productions were planning to build their resort-complex, it was decided to place it at the foot of Empire Mountain. Forest Service avalanche specialists called this a call to disaster. A snow deflection barrier was erected high up on Empire Mountain, but avalanches flowed gracefully over it. Then Disney brought in another 'expert' who came with a 75-mm recoilless rifle to trigger slides while they were still small. It was mounted on a platform along the south bank of the Kaweah River and tests were conducted.

Then came the winter of 1968-69. Disney had hired another avalanche expert and three part-time ski mountaineers were also hired to spend some time in Mineral King to check out extreme winter conditions. Heavy snowfall piled drifts both on the valley floor and on the hanging walls above, and these continued to build up. A film crew was brought to record this wonderful snow scene, but by Sunday, February 23rd, all the film workers had left, due to the increasing storm, and they were soon followed by the rest of the crew, except for ski-mountaineer Randy Kletka. That night the snow pack became too much and a series of tremendous avalanches roared down the slopes. On Empire Mountain, the snow deflection barriers were overswept and the original Mineral King village site was under 30 feet of snow. Mother Nature, proving she was not to be tampered with, hurled the recoilless gun into the Kaweah River, where it was only found the following October. Randy Kletka had taken refuge in the dining room of Buckman's old resort. The building was covered with 14 feet of snow, but a tunnel had been dug for access. But slides covered the chimney and Kletka was smothered to death. A rescue crew arrived too late.

The Disney corporation reacted swiftly to disassociate themselves from the tragedy, putting out press releases that Kletka was not an employee, but possibly a hippie trespasser. As soon as possible, all damaged buildings were put to the torch and debris removed.

But Mother Nature still does not like to be fooled with and will undoubtly continue to hurl avalanches at those who ignore her forces!

Ecology

AT FIRST glance the valley of Mineral King, with its mosaic of wildlife communities, looks as though it never bothered with a botany rule. Sequoias grow on the open slope above the village, too high and too few in number for the way of their species. At the same elevation on Empire Mountain, a sunshine forest of shrubby manzanita and chinquapin spreads its desert foliage while gray sages climb the avalanche paths. The effects of snow, rather than the sun, is attested by the magnificent colonies of red fir on the flats and ledges where drifts are deepest. Down, nearly to this same level, Alpine fell fields extend below Farewell Gap.

Generalization based on altitude-zones fail as often as they hold, except when the high passes and wind-swept summits are reached. It is more rewarding to search for diversity, for the many climates-in-miniature of this country. Without even hiking, half a dozen islands of tree and plant growth can be seen, each with its population of food-gathering birds and animals. Over toward Monarch Canyon, chipmunks are harvesting the seeds of chinquapin, towhees scratch like elegant chickens in the shade of the chapparal, an occasional bull snake lazes along. Mule deer come down from the shelter of the lodgepole pines to browse the manzanita.

Aspens flourish at the opposite end of the valley, giving hospitality to a different set of tenants. Sierra grouse are fond of aspen catkins and seed, coyotes hunt, in winter the rarely seen Sierra hare (snowshoe rabbit) survives by nibbling the bark.

The streamside province, although narrow, is quite different. Willows predominate, with their occupants, the thrushes, finches and warblers, which draw, in turn, marauding squirrels in search of nests. Twilight sends the late patrols of blue-green swallows to roost and

Avalanche destroyed cabin
Bruton Peterson collection

brings the brown bats and even an occasional pair of nighthawks to hunt above the stream. Water ousels have at least five established nesting places among its rocky bends, one within 25 feet of the road.

Far above the stream and the road, blackbirds use the very top of the tallest red firs as marshalling areas when their vacation draws to an end. Spaced socially down the fir columns, the Sierra chickadee, the red-shafted flicker, and the least chipmunk have their territories. The California ground squirrel and the showoff golden-mantled ground squirrel make their homes at the base of the firs.

With a free-wheeling disregard of all boundaries, man's as well as nature's, black bears prowl the whole area. In some years, the bear population exceeds the food supply, so that campers and packers are in for epic bear raids. In 1960 there were regular evening processions of bears shuffling the quiet dust, wending down toward the village, the campgrounds, and the ever-enticing dump. The following winter, half-starved bears invaded Three Rivers ranches, there to have an end put to their careers.

As a game refuge, the valley has had to go through a period of convalescence from past depredations. Cougars, wolverines, and other predators were 'cleaned out' by early prospectors and hunters. When all hunting was suspended, the ubiquitous mule deer promptly overtaxed their range. Special deer hunts have been held at intervals, in an attempt to restore balance. At present, no hunting is permitted.

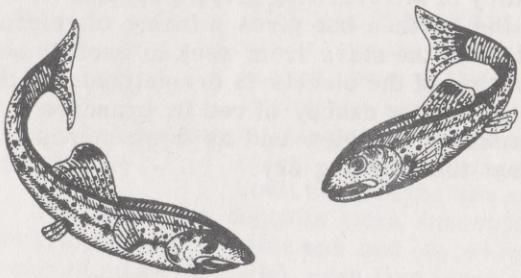
There is a great deal to enjoy in wilderness by observing the ways of its most common creatures, even their daily croppings of its meadow flowers. Noticing the family conferences of the marmots, the territorial disputes of the jays, the pattern of a chipmunk's survey of the campground; something will be learned of the social life in their realms. It is research material such as no library provides.

Fishing

When Harry Parole, Mineral King's first publicist, came over Farewell Gap, he found no fish in the streams and lakes, despite the abundance of wildlife generally. Wiley Watson, ex-mayor of Visalia and ardent believer in the ores of Mineral King, in 1873 planted its first trout. He packed four native rainbows from the Little Kern over the Gap in a half-gallon coffee pot. Later, the Loup boys, early miners, stocked Eagle Lake with about 400 minnows from the creek. The Mineral King storekeeper, Arthur Crowley, in 1895, caught the first trout from Eagle Lake, the first of some heroic old-time catches. The cafe

has some excellent photographs of the old-time fisherman, the old-time limits, and the good old 14-inchers.

In the 1920's the stream was stocked from the Mineral King hatchery; the old curbings are still visible between the stream and the cafe. Now the Department of Fish and Game stocks the stream weekly, planting about 300,000 catchables each summer. The lakes are planted with fingerlings by air drops.



Weather

At Mineral King, weather may arrive as surprise packages — perhaps with a little warning of clouds over Timber Gap and in the canyon downstream, so ambiguous that an old-timer will be reluctant to predict. High, thin afternoon clouds may build up on successive days and lower for a storm, in the general Sierra pattern. Having radio weather reports is the most reliable way to make a good guess — at least from the valley.

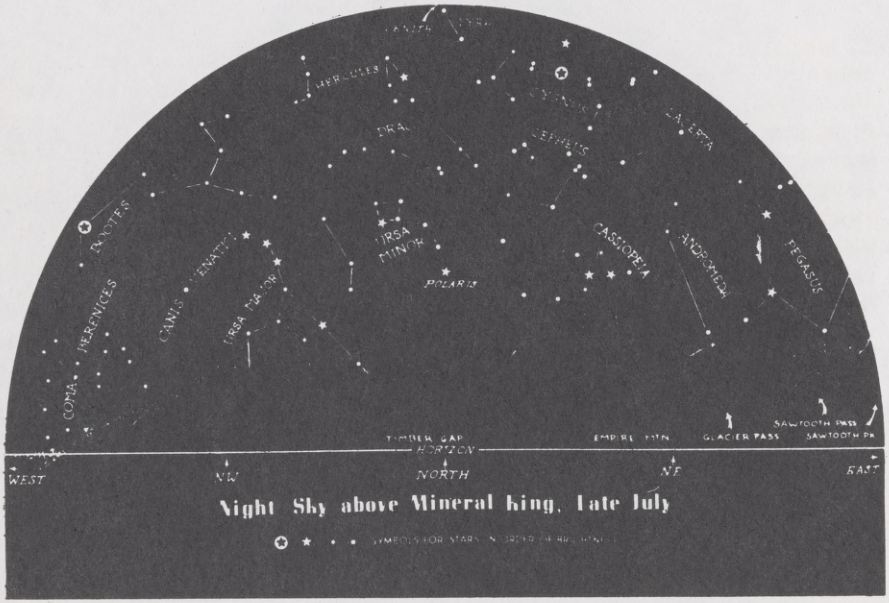
From the high slopes east of the valley, observing clouds work over the Coast Range is helpful. In summer, the dry heat of the Great Central Valley causes the vapors of Pacific-spawned storm-masses to expand so tremendously that, for an observer above Mineral King, they will be invisible until they are almost upon him. When conditions are right, a cloud mass above the Coast Range can move eastward unseen until the coolness barrier of the Great Western Divide causes it to re-form as storm clouds.

When this happens, we get rain; if the condensation is rapid enough at a low enough altitude, if there was moisture enough in the cloud mass to begin with, and if an additional half dozen variables make up the right combination. Summer rain is not frequent, although there are wet and dry years here as elsewhere.

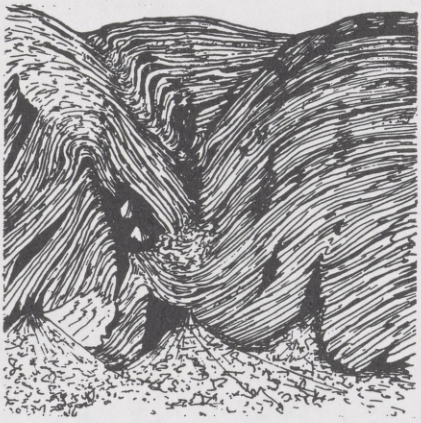
NIGHT-SKY

Summer nights in the Sierra are really too beautiful for sleeping. The sky may be kaleidoscoped with clouds or infinitely clear. The moonlight often sparkles the streams and whitens the slopes and the meadows, or the brilliant arc of a shooting star — precious, all of it, to people with never an everyday chance to watch.

The broad valley of Mineral King gives a special view of the night sky. It constricts the horizon but gives a frame of reference, so that the apparent motion of the stars from week to week is noticeable and the nightly procession of the planets is dramatized. In the shelter of the valley, the high feather canopy of red fir branches is roof enough. It scarcely diminishes the view and as dawn comes it makes a lovely tracery against the morning sky.



Night Sky above Mineral King, late July



Geology

MINERAL KING VALLEY is walled with remnants of some of the most ancient rocks of the Sierra Nevada. Preserved here in a belt fourteen miles long by two miles wide are relics of sedimentary strata laid down beneath the sea some 200 million years ago. The limestone deposits were succeeded by shales, sandstone was overtopped by volcanic ash and coarse volcanic fragments in a compacted mass (breccia); even lava flows contributed to the build-up of the beds.

In Mesozoic time the sedimentary strata were tightly folded and intensely deformed. The high pressures and temperatures converted them into marble, slate and schist. So great was the alteration that it is not now possible to determine how thick the sedimentary beds were originally. Yet their characteristics were not altogether completely changed. Fossils are still preserved in some of these rocks, in the light gray band of marble that can be seen high on the mountainside east of Mineral King. These fossils have been found along this band of marble nearly as far south as Farewell Gap. They are of the Age of Reptiles (Upper Triassic) – about 200 million years ago.

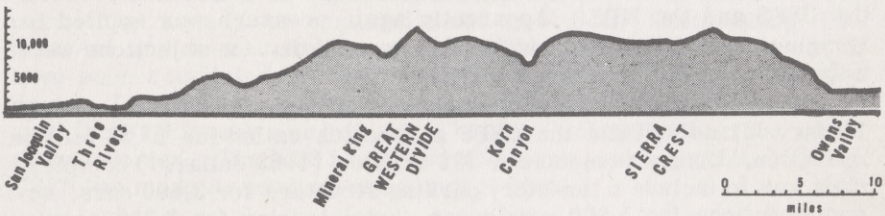
The colorful stripes and whorls of the exposed rock layers give an indication of the tremendous scale of the folding processes. These are particularly striking on the flank of Rainbow Mountain, looking north from across Franklin Creek. As the rocks became metamorphosed, the original minerals of the sedimentary rocks recrystallized and developed planes of cleavage (schistocity). In many places, these planes are nearly vertical – great bands of rock appearing to stand on end.

Of more recent origin is the granite from which Sawtooth Peak, Florence Peak, and the whole great chalice of mountains surrounding Mineral King have been carved. The folded metamorphic rocks were intruded by and engulfed in great masses of molten material which on

crystallizing formed granite. This younger rock surrounds and protects the relatively soft and easily eroded ancient strata. This bears the brunt of the severe erosion which has elsewhere stripped away comparable strata from most of the southern Sierra.

There is no indication that the present valley originated through faulting. Every evidence, including the symmetry of the beautiful band of cavern-pierced white marble around the valley walls, points to its origin as stream and glacier erosion along planes of schistocity. The valleys of the Mineral King branch of the East Fork of the Kaweah, the Little Kern, and Timber Gap Creek run parallel to the axis of the belt of metamorphic rocks, as erosion took place on the least resistant of the old strata. When glaciers held sway, the valleys were deepened and carved into the characteristic U-shaped cross-sections with wide valley floors. At the same time, the hanging valleys were produced by the same ice action. This sculpturing was equally well developed in the hard granite and across the edges of the softer slates and schists. At Monarch, Crystal, Franklin, White Chief, and Eagle lakes cirques evolved partly in granite and partly in metamorphic rocks with the symmetry of the amphitheatres in no way impaired by the contrasting hardness of these rocks.

Among the colorful crystals, the precious metals should have been concentrated by the smelting techniques of nature. So they were, but without the lucky recipe that produced the Mother Lode. The rock is highly mineralized but, even with modern methods, the deposits are not extensive enough to be profitable. Rich specimens can still be picked up — free silver, horn silver, ores of antimony, lead, copper, and zinc, and once in a while a piece of gray quartz with flecks of shining gold.



EAST-WEST PROFILE THROUGH MINERAL KING, Lat. 36° 25'

Sawtooth, Mineral and Needham peaks
photo by Bruton Peterson

Mineral King vs Disney

With the post-war ski boom, it was only natural that attention would turn toward Mineral King, with its alpine-like narrow valley and deep snow fields. In 1948 both the Forest Service and the Sierra Club made surveys of the possibilities and while it was apparent that better access would be needed, the Forest Service approved and the Sierra Club went along with the proposal to develop a skiing project. It must be pointed out that the Sierra Club report only considered limited mechanical development and was more interested in cross-country (now called 'Nordic') skiing. At no time did they even consider an amusement-park type of ski resort-complex.

In 1948 the Forest Service asked for bids from private concerns for development of Mineral King as a winter sports resort. But all were frightened by the great cost of major road improvement and the lack of federal or state funds for such work, and no bids were made.

Then in February, 1965, the Forest Service again offered a prospectus, suggesting a development at some cost in the order of three million dollars. Six bids were received, of which five were of the suggested order, while the sixth, that of Disney Productions, proposed a $35 million project for a grandiose year-round amusement complex. During the summer, the little county road to Mineral King was suddenly included in the state highway system, without a legislative hearing being held. Many felt that Disney had been able to bring enough pressure to accomplish this, and sure enough in December, 1965, Disney Productions were authorized to prepare a preliminary draft, to be submitted within three years.

There was an instant uproar, especially since this meant building a highway across National Park lands and led to a conflict between the USFS and the NPS. Apparently again pressure was applied in Washington at the cabinet level and it seemed that the objections were to be swept aside (or perhaps under the rug).

A glance at the Disney project shows the magnitude of the proposed 'Disneyskiland'. While the USFS prospectus called for a $3 million operation, Disney projected a $35 million (1969 dollars!) complex. This was to include a ten-story parking structure for 3,600 cars, accommodations for 1,000 employees, hotel lodging for 3,310 people, a convention center, theater, ice-skating rink, indoor and outdoor pools, snack bars, coffee shops, etc. This was to service 22 to 29

ski lifts, and some of these were to have 150-seat sandwich and gift shops at their upper terminals.

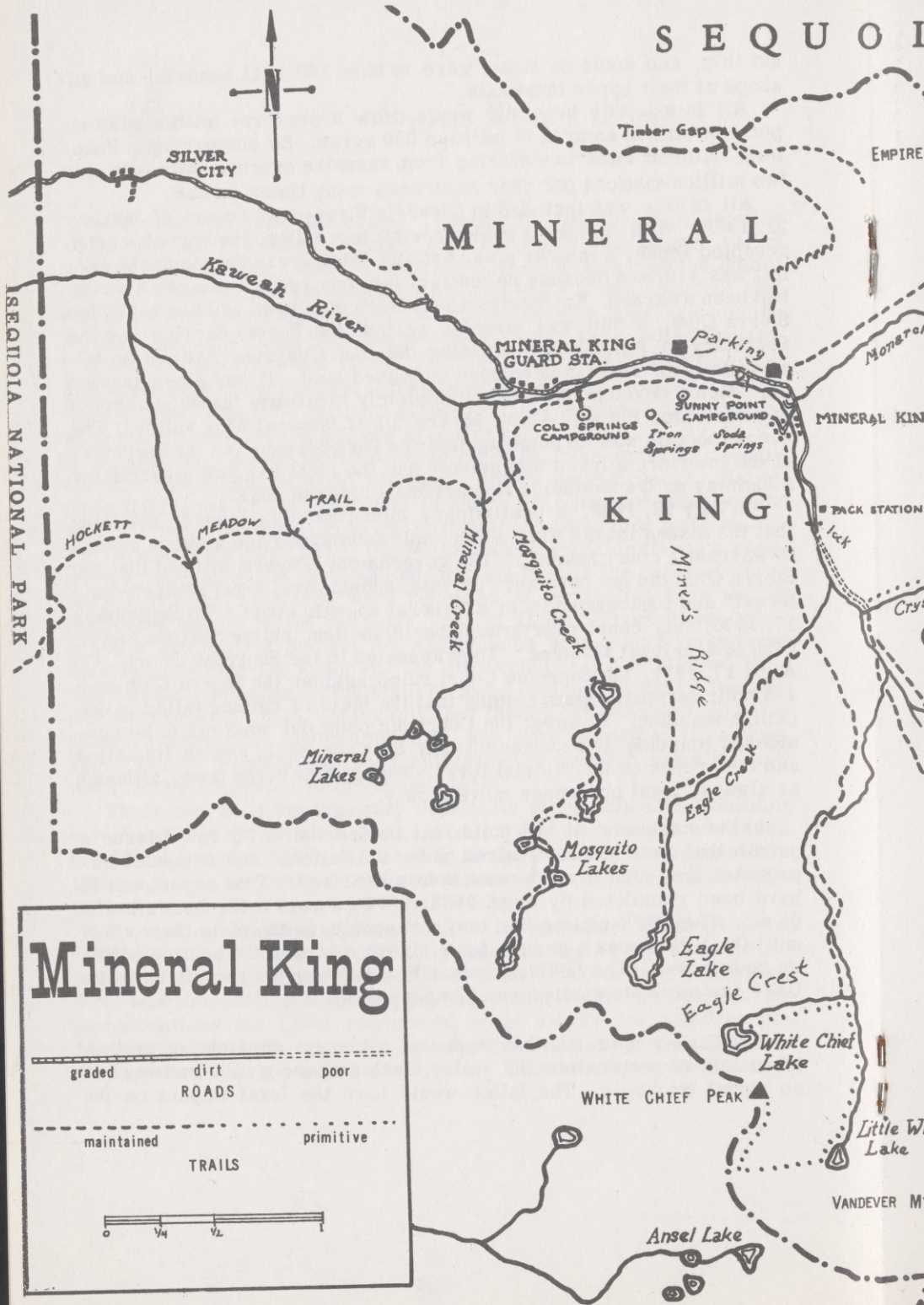
All in all, this hopefully would draw some three million visitors per year, all in an area of perhaps 300 acres. By comparison, Yosemite National Park is suffering from massive overuse with less than two million visitors per year in an area many times larger.

All of this was included in Disney's three-year report of January 21, 1969. With neither a public review nor notice, the Forest Service accepted Disney's master plan, but the thirty-year development permit was withheld because no contract for construction of a new highway had been awarded. Enviromentalists were dismayed and headed by the Sierra Club, a suit was directed against the Forest Service and the Secretary of Agriculture, pointing out that Congress had set an 80-acre limit for resorts developed on leased land. It was alos asserted that such a development would completely invalidate the provisions of Sequoia Game Refuge, which covers all of Mineral King valley. The second section was directed against the Park Service and the Secretary of the Interior; alleged that neither had the right to grant a permit for a highway or transmission line across a national park.

On July 23, 1969, a preliminary injunction was issued, claiming that the issues raised were sufficiently substantial and serious enough to warrant a court hearing. The government lawyers alleged that the Sierra Club did not have any "private, substantive, legal protected interest" and took the case to a Federal appeals court. On September 17, 1970, this court overturned the injunction, ruling that the Sierra Club had no legal standing. They appealed to the Supreme Court. On April 17, 1972, the Supreme Court ruled against the Sierra Club on a 4-3 split decision, again holding that the Sierra Club had failed to establish standing. However the Court did point out what might be considered standing and suggested that the Club could amend its action and then refile on the district level. This is now being done, although as always, legal processes move slowly.

In the meantime, it was held that before the USFS could issue a permit that a study was required under the National Enviromental Impact Act and such a study was then authorized. This report was to have been completed by June, 1973, but by a year later had failed to do so. The USFS claims that they are unable to complete their study until the NPS issues a permit for a highway across the section within its boundaries. The NPS has refused to issue such a permit until the USFS has made its enviromental impact study.

The Disney operation has explored alternate methods of getting thousands of people into the valley, including a cog-line railway and an aerial tramway. The latter would have the least impact on the


SEQUOI
Timber Gap
EMPIRE
SILVER CITY
MINERAL
Kaweah River
SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK
MINERAL KING GUARD STA.
Parking
COLD SPRINGS CAMPGROUND
SUNNY POINT CAMPGROUND
Iron Springs
Soda Springs
MINERAL KIN
KING
PACK STATION
HOCKETT
MEADOW
TRAIL
Mineral Creek
Mosquito Creek
Miner's Ridge
Mineral Lakes
Mosquito Lakes
Eagle Creek
Eagle Lake
Eagle Crest
White Chief Lake
WHITE CHIEF PEAK
Ansel Lake
VANDEVER
Mineral King
graded
dirt
poor
ROADS
maintained
primitive
TRAILS
0
1/4
1/2
1

Spring Lake
Cyclamen Lake
EMPIRE MTN.
Sawtooth Pass
Lost Canyon
Columbine Lake
Lower Ground Hog Meadow
Monarch Creek
SAWTOOTH PEAK
NEEDHAM MTN.
Monarch Lakes
NATIONAL
MINERAL KING
MINERAL PK.
Amphitheater Lake
PACK STATION
Crystal Lake
GREAT WESTERN
Lower Cobalt Lake
Crystal Creek
Upper Cobalt Lake
PARK
GAME
Soda Creek
REFUGE
Franklin Creek
RAINBOW MTN.
Little Claire Lake
Farewell Canyon
DIVIDE
Franklin Lakes
Franklin Pass
TULARE PK.
Rattlesnake Creek
BOUNDARY
FLORENCE PEAK
Little White Chief Lake
REFUGE
WEST FLORENCE PK.
GAME
VANDEVER MTN.
Farewell Gap
Bullfrog Lakes
Ranger
Shotgun Pass
SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST

beauty and the serenity of the country through which it passes, but could not be funded under normal state policy. With the galloping inflation and increased construction costs, the price of a highway will have doubled, possibly now reaching $100 million. The Highway Commission violently opposes this use of funds, pointing out it would very seriously cripple regular highway plans throughout the state for a number of years.

While all is in limbo, the USFS has steadily 'put the squeeze' on mountain home leasees and on campers, slowly phasing out campgrounds and leases. At the present time there are but 37 campsites available within the valley, which at 4 people per site, allow for but 148 overnight visitors. There are possibly an equal number of day-use spots, providing an upper limit of some 300 per day. Contrast this with the 14,000 average under Disney's plan! The Service claims it cannot increase camping facilities until the NEIA study is filed.

During the summer of 1974, Disney Enterprises announced a contemplated ski development in the Truckee area, but were firm in stating that this was not an abandonment of their Mineral King projected development – the Truckee project would serve the Bay area.

It would be hard to come up with a simple analysis of the situation here in late 1974. It appears that the USFS is still going along with Disney's grandiose plans (a possible $800,000 in fees and leases does carry an awful big clout). Still many of their personel, speaking off-record, realize the effect of any such development on this fragile little valley. It is possible in the end that such factors as booming construction costs, tight money and strict enviromental controls will prove to be the deciding parameters.

Trails & Trips

A GUIDEBOOK always stands in need of revision. Routes improve, deteriorate, disappear — the old Glacier Trail no less than Rome's Appian Way. The face of nature changes, even our attitudes toward nature, and our interests change. Fifty years ago, when Elliott's "Guide to the Grand and Sublime Scenery" was popular, the most respectable reason for loafing out-of-doors was to cultivate ones sensibilities. More recently we've gone to the wilderness with a studious attitude, to learn, conserve, think about what we find. Somewhere between exaggerated wonderment and the technical analysis, there is a place for a whole range of personal discoveries. Without being a catalog of raves on the scenery, or a how-to-do list for covering the ground, this guide attempts to suggest what to look for, and to characterize this one very special alcove of the Sierra.

Distances and estimates of difficulty are intended as aids for selecting where to go and planning what to wear and take along. The easiest trail can become hazardous or exhausting when the hiker has had bad luck with time, weather, or his own physical condition — blisters included. Forest Service and National Park trails and campsites are increasing well-planned and maintained, the topo maps are good, the whole area is a friendly place — there are even fine rescue services — but nothing substitutes for your good judgement in the mountains.

Half-day Trips

1. SODA SPRINGS — an easy stroll. from the roadend, go north down the road, cross the bridge, and turn left on the little dirt road to the cabins. Behind the last cabin continue over an old plank pathway through the marsh into a grove of young pines. The spring is to the left, near the stream, It lies at the base of a granite boulder. In addition to carbonates, the water contains iron and other minerals so that the spring has built up a rim of rusty orange and a lining of soft sediments. Dip carefully, leaving the deposits undisturbed, and enjoy the lively natural soda water. Since the spring is completely unguarded, each user shares the old-fashioned backwoods responsibility for keeping it clean. There are cool streamside picnic spots and fisherman's footpaths to explore from here.

2. COLD SPRINGS CAMPGROUND – an easy trail walk. From the road-end take the dirt road marked 'to Iron Spring' as far as Sunny Point campground turnoff, then continue on a trail. To the left are the ruins of an old mill grown over and even through by aspens. Beyond, on the margin of a grassy slope, is Iron Springs with cold, slightly carbonated water welling up in its rusty font. Look for grouse here -- they have a habit of exploding up from the grass with a whirring roar.

The trail follows along the south bank of the stream through aspens and tall stands of wildflowers. A sheer rock wall on the left shows glacial polish. From this it has been estimated that the glacier here attained a thickness of 1000 feet.

Two garnet mines are visible from this trail. The garnets are not of gem quality, but interesting crystals, the size of a pea, shine in the dusty mounds beneath the pits. On the ledges above here are several caved-in shafts, remnants of work done on the Sequoia Silver-Lead Claim. The trail continues through the campground to the bridge. Cold spring water flows from a pipe near this bridge and, just beyond, the trail to Hockett Meadows begins.

3. FRANKLIN CREEK – an easy trail hike, a favorite horseback ride. If you are spending only one day in Mineral King this probably will be the most satisfactory short trip. The climb is less than 600 feet, but with good overlooks of the valley and a picnic spot at the pool of an exuberant cascade, it gives a remarkably good introduction to this country.

Follow the dirt road branching from the main road just below the bridge continue upstream past the pack station (parking here only for patrons) and ford Crystal Lake Creek on stepping stones (green pebbles glisten like gems in the water – Sierra jade). The road passes a fork leading to the now closed camping area across the creek, and continues upstream to where the newly rebuilt Forest Service trail to Franklin Lakes and Pass takes off.

The first hikers of the morning will see a close pattern of hoof prints in the trail dust. The mule deer appreciate its gentle gradient as they drift between their bed sites on the ledges and their browsing in the aspens and flower fields. As the trail rounds the base of an unnamed peak, it crosses a microcosm of upland desert. Among the fragrant sage brush clumps a few splendid Blazing Stars open their yellow flowers on midsummer nights.

At the falls, with scarcely a transition, there is a profusion of soft green leaves, mimulus, columbine, tuffets of emerald moss. Beyond are the steep wildflower slopes and the snow patches of Farewell Gap. The comparison is striking between the narrow V-valley above this point and the U-shape below. The old glacial headwall, once bedded in the fragile rock just here, has been eroded away since the last ice age, extending the valley to Farewell Gap.

4. LOOP TRIP OF THE VALLEY – a short day's hike or horseback ride, traversing the main valley. From the Mineral King Pack Station, take the route to Franklin Falls. Continue toward Farewell Gap about 300 yards beyond the Franklin Pass turnoff, then cross the ravine (the stream flows

underground here, except during rainy periods) to pick up the old trail for the return. This early route from the village to Farewell Gap is plainly visible on the west slope.

By carrying a canteen from the Franklin Creek Falls, picnicking on either side of the canyon is feasible. The east side has a good overlook of the valley from a high bench between the trail and creek. The west side offers several shaded spots, one of the loveliest is on the stream from White Chief Lake where cascades leap down moss-grown ledges.

Return to the village by fording the stream and rejoining the road to the pack station, or by climbing to the Eagle Lake trail. This is a 400-foot trailless scramble westward from the ford but, once the trail is reached you can enjoy an afternoon view of the valley and the mellow colors of the walls beyond.

5. LOWER GROUNDHOG MEADOW — a moderate trail hike, altitude gain of 1700 feet. This is a beautiful picnic spot, a well-watered garden of Sierra shooting star, heather and soft grass where marmots flourish. The back-east miners named the spot in their honor — Groundhog Meadow.

Take the Monarch Lake trail which starts north from the bend in the road going into Mineral King. Follow it up the chinquapin and manzanita slope as it climbs above Monarch Creek, early on hot days when the sun pours directly into its brush-walled aisle by mid-morning. It's worth stopping for a view down the valley when you reach the veteran junipers which grow from crevices in the bare metamorphic rock. Above, across Monarch Creek, a fine cascade leaps from beneath the earth, dashing down to the main stream. A rugged fin of volcanic rock rises to the north, the relic of a lava flow more ancient than the uplift of the range. At the foot of Groundhog Meadow the Crystal Lake trail crosses the stream. Explore an old cabin site on the grassy bench here, and the little amphitheatre beyond, a favorite browsing place for mule deer.

6. HOCKETT MEADOW TRAIL — a moderate trail hike shaded by ponderosa pine and fir trees, ideal on a warm day. Take the Tar Gap - Hockett Meadow trail just south of the Cold Springs Campground bridge. After a short climb, the trail crosses the steep, boulder-worn courses of Mosquito and Mineral Creeks. The length of the hike is adjustable. Along the nearly level miles of trail to Tar Gap there are many pleasant stopping places — streamlets, flower fields, shady forest coves.

CREEK CLIMBING — impromptu adventures. Five streams cascade into Mineral King from hanging valleys. A trailless scramble along any one of them, although strenuous, reveals more of the area's geology than can be seen from the trails. From their lakes the streams flow in glacier-carved channels to where the main glacier swept through. Here the walls of the present valley rise sheer and the water leaps from ledge to ledge to the quiet trout stream below. Climbing in and alongside the creek beds, the adventurer finds, at the top of each glacier-hewn stairstep, a miniature landscape of rock, water and growing things.

One-day Trips

1. TIMBER GAP, explore the Empire Mine, a moderate hike — trail and cross-country. (2.5 miles to Gap, no water, elevation gain, 1500 feet.) The divide separating the Middle and East Forks of the Kaweah River opens a wide vista toward Giant Forest and the granite ramparts of its platform. A few hundred feet up the Monarch trail the Timber Gap route cuts sharply left to switchback across a sunny apron of chaparral. Through scattered timber, the trail reaches denuded slopes, avalanche scoured. A few hundred yards above, the site of the tramway and shaft openings of the Empire Mine can be made out in a rocky draw. Continuing to the pass, Alta Peak appears across the glaciated valley, framed by the dark fir trees.

At Timber Gap, explore the old cabin sites, where eighty year old wood piles still remain. Scout for the old mine road which contours back across the open slope. It's not easy to imagine log bunkhouses, timbered mine entrances, and the famous tramway to the smelter and 100-stamp mill below. Yet a newspaper in 1878 reported The Monarch of Mines — An Empire of Wealth — A Silver-lined Cave — Tons Upon Tons of Payrock.

2. MONARCH LAKES, moderately strenuous trail hike (3 miles, elevation gain 2600 feet). A pair of glacial lakes, the upper one larger, blessed with fewer mosquitoes and, usually, better fishing.

The rather steep trail, beginning at the bend of the road below the village, climbs the length of Monarch Canyon from its threshold at Black Wolf Falls to its headwall at the lakes. Beyond Groundhog Meadow, the country is treeless, alpine; pikas whistle from the talus slopes. The trail ascends a series of shallow basins toward Sawtooth Peak. In striking contrast with the monolithic granites such as Moro Rock, Sawtooth is coarsely granular, disintegrating rapidly to form sand slopes. It is climbed frequently. The view westward is typical of this side of the tilted Sierra block. Mt. Whitney is among the high peaks to the east.

> **Sawtooth Peak** (12,343) Hike past the head of upper lake, then scramble east to south ridge of Sawtooth Peak. Hike over and around large boulders up south ridge to summit (class 2). Gain from Mineral King to summit: 4500 feet.
>
> **Needham Mountain** (12,467) Take Monarch Lakes trail over Sawtooth Pass to Columbine Lake (5 miles from the village). Scramble south from lake to Sawtooth-Needham ridge (class 2). Contour just south of ridge east and up southwest slope of Needham to the summit (class 1 with class 2 at the summit).
>
> **Alternate**: From Monarch Lakes, scramble over saddle between Monarch and Amphitheatre Lakes (class 3 in spots). Contour around north side of Amphitheatre Lake, across flat basin, and up easy southwest slope of Needham to summit. This route is shorter but involves some class 3 climbing.

3. FRANKLIN LAKES and PASS, a moderate trail hike — fairly strenuous with the climb to the pass. (5 miles to Lower Franklin Lake, elevation

Upper Mosquito Lake
photo by Bruton Peterson

gain 2500 feet; 7 miles to pass, elevation gain 3500 feet). The largest of Mineral King's lakes, Lower Franklin shimmers 30 acres of blue water in a glacial-quarried basin. Upper Franklin lies 400 feet higher, in a glacier cirque beneath the steep north wall of Florence Peak. Fishing is good-to-excellent in both lakes.

The well-graded trail from the valley climbs toward Farewell Gap, doubles back across a hillside of grass and wildflowers into a fine stand of conifers, and then rounds a knoll of broken, rust-red slate into Franklin Canyon. In the slate, just above the trail, is the prospect hole of an old silver claim. The miners named the claims on this ledge hopefully — Silver King , Silver Queen , Silver Lake . Downstream a few hundred yards is the claim from which the canyon takes its name — the Lady Franklin — a tribute to an English noblewoman, widow of the lost Artic explorer.

From Lower Franklin Lake the trail ascends broad ledges of juniper trees, then switchbacks over disintegrated granite to the pass. The cleanly cut helmet of Mt. Whitney appears among the peaks of the main Sierra crest to the east. To the north are the steep ridges of the Kaweahs with the ancient erosion surface of the Chagoopa Plateau before them. Immediately below, the canyon of Rattlesnake Creek plunges to the long, straight trench of the Kern River.

Rainbow Mountain (11,975) Its summit, the red andesite rock of an old lava flow, is 0.5 mile to the north over an easy ridge. The simple take-off point is at the low saddle just below the pass.

Florence Peak (12,432) It is a class 2 scramble over easy granite boulders along the ridge rising south of the pass.

Tulare Peak (11,588) From the dam at Lower Franklin Lake, work up the broad north ridge to the summit.

4. CRYSTAL LAKE, a strenuous trail hike. (4 miles, 3000 feet). From the Monarch Lake trail at Lower Groundhog Meadow, strike south across the stream into timber. Past rugged ledges of limestone, through shady ravines where mule deer make their beds, the trail traverses exposed rock strata below Mineral Peak. Whorls of lichen add their color to the banded pinks and yellows. Old prospect holes below the trail are marked by heaps of eroded copper-red sand.

Where the trail tops the long western ridge of Mineral Peak, a short detour to the knob at the right of the trail gives a view of the valley. In late summer, pikas harvest the seed tips of red heather here, storing them in crevices beneath the rocks.

The trail dips above the glaciated stairway of Crystal Creek with Cobalt Lakes, small jade-green pools, far below. A bright ribbon of water twists from the outflow of Crystal Lake high on the red slate wall ahead. Evidence of long-ago prospecting can be found near the trail as it zig-zags

across the transition zone between metamorphic and granitic rock. The cup of Crystal Lake was glaciated with a fine symmetry from tiers of white granite on one side, dark metamorphosed rock on the other. Fishing is good. The highest of Mineral King's lakes, its eastern brook trout are numerous but not, as a rule, very plump. A small campsite just at the timberline has a magnificent view to the west.

Mineral Peak (11,550) is a class 2 scramble over ledges west of the lake, then along the east ridge to the summit.

An alternate return route is down Crystal Creek, leaving the trail below the switchbacks, taking an interesting descent along what was originally a stream course beneath the ancient glacier. It is possible to pick up the trail made in 1902, during the construction of the dam, except in the lower reaches where it is overgrown. Here, the main valley is in view and any passable route can be used.

5. FAREWELL GAP, moderate trail hike. (5 miles, elevation gain 2700 feet) With a view along the axis of the valley to the northwest and into the canyon of the Little Kern to the southeast, it has been favored, traditionally, as a vantage point — a friendly gateway. The trail climbs steadily toward the head of the narrowing valley through aspens and pine trees at first, then up gentle alpine meadows. A succession of wildflowers blossoms through the summer. On good snow years a bearskin-shaped snow patch lingers below Vandever Mountain.

Vandever Mountain (11,947) From Farewell Gap, climb right up the east slope of the mountain to summit, class 1, over very loose metamorphic rock. Care should be taken on the descent to avoid twisting an ankle.

6. WHITE CHIEF MEADOW and LAKE, a moderately strenuous trail hike (3.5 miles, the last half mile to the lake is steep; elevation gain 1500 feet to the meadow, 2600 feet to the lake) Site of the valley's first silver strike the richly colored metamorphic strata abut on granite just at the lake. The old mine shaft, where 48 miners and 16 Chinese laborers once worked to drive a tunnel into the White Chief Lode, is now no more than a derelict. Bunkhouse and cabin sites can be explored near the meadow. Many pit remains can be searched for mineral specimens. Fishing is fair.

From the roadend, a well-worn trail angles gradually up the west wall of the valley. Crossing Eagle Creek, continue past the Eagle Lake-Mosquito Lake turnoff into timber. Above the point where the trail reaches White Chief Creek, ragged aisles of low shrubs mark avalanche paths. Here occurred Mineral King's only fatal mining accident. Three men working far into the winter of 1887 on the White Chief Lode were struck by an avalanche as they tried to make their way out on snow shoes. Two men were able to dig themselves out, the third was lost.

The trail climbs dark shale cliffs, reaching the foot of White Chief Meadow. The ridge to the left has quartz veins with miniature gardens of crystals — pink, to rust-red, to brown, to lavender. Beautiful white turrets of crys-

talline rock, crumbling to a coarse sand at the touch, surmount the lower end of the ridge. A little farther along, a shallow pond at the upper end of the ridge, is a good place to observe birds, water creatures, and small animals. Above the meadows a stream enters from the right out of White Chief Lake. Straight ahead lies a beautiful band of white marble with many caverns which may be cautiously explored.

White Chief Peak (11,020+) From Little White Chief Lake, climb easy class 2 slopes to the saddle to the west, then right up the ridge to the summit.

7. BULLFROG LAKES, a long hike or horseback day-trip to a pair of lakes at 11,000 feet in a cirque south of Florence Peak. More remote than any of the 16 trout lakes usually fished from Mineral King, they have provided excellent fishing in most years.

From the pack station, follow the road to Franklin Pass-Farewell Gap trail, climb to the gap and continue down about a mile to a blazed trail on the left. Follow ducks across a shale bench to the stream, cross, approaching Lower Bullfrog from the southwest.

8. EAGLE LAKE, a moderate trail hike. (4 miles, elevation gain 2000 feet). Perhaps the most beautifully mounted of the area's gem-like lakes, sheared granite encloses it on two sides, a park-like forest and brilliant metamorphic rock on the others. Fishing is fair to good.

Take the Eagle Lake Trail from the roadend which ascends the west wall of the valley, crossing Eagle Creek to turn right (uphill) at the marker. The switchbacks through red fir and lodgepoles bring the trail to Eagle Creek again just at the point where it drops underground into a layer of gleaming marble, white dappled with light grey. After the Mosquito Lakes Trail forks to the right, a steep climb up switchbacks brings you to tiny streamside meadows, just below the outlet from the lake.

9. MOSQUITO LAKES, a moderate trail hike to the second of the five lakes, (5 miles, elevation gain 1800 feet). From the fork mentioned above, the Mosquito Lakes Trail skirts a long ridge, crossing a second timbered ridge, dropping to the lake. A campground is being developed here.

Pack Trips

HOCKETT MEADOWS, 4 or 5 day tour of the country to the west of Mineral King, 3 travelling days. Open earlier in the year than the high passes, it is an area of luxurious forests, meadows and trout streams.

From Mineral King, an easy ten miles of trail contours past Tar Gap, across the boundary into Sequoia National Park, and through a long reach of lodgepole and foxtail pine to Hockett Meadows. Leaving camp at the Meadows, much of the next day is spent traversing a series of flower fields and the Boreal, or Canadian, Life-zone gardens along the South Fork of the Kaweah. July is the usual blossom time at these elevations, although

Lower Mosquito Lake
photo by Bruton Peterson

this may change slightly with the year-to-year variation in snowfall and melting. The second camp is at Wet Meadows, a bench at the north end of Windy Ridge, high above the chasm of the Little Kern.

The third travelling day traces the probable route of Harry Parole when he discovered Mineral King Valley, and the later trail of the prospectors from Porterville. Holding along the steep valley wall, the trail reaches the headwaters of the Little Kern and with Vandever Mountain to the left and Florence Peak to the right, crosses Farewell Gap and descends to the village.

THE GRAND TOUR — by mule or backpack into the high country. The basic loop trip may be varied according to time and your personal mountaineering enthusiasms. The route traverses fascinating country for the artist and photographer, trout streams and remote lakes come within easy reach, and the very heartland of the Sierra can be surveyed from the high mountain passes.

1ST TRAVELLING DAY: From Mineral King the trail climbs past Lower Franklin Lake and up well-constructed switchbacks to cross the Great Western Divide at Franklin Pass (11,400). Rather steeply the trail descends to a nearly flat rock bench, a remmant of the pre-Sierra landscape. Here it enters the narrow canyon of Rattlesnake Creek. With a leisurely trip schedule, camp the first night is at Forester Lake, a mile north of the trail on a wooded plateau. Otherwise, the trail is followed seven miles from the pass to primitive Cow Camp. This meadow was used as a range camp by stockmen in the days before Sequoia National Park was formed. Evening fishing in Rattlesnake Creek is usually good.

2ND TRAVELLING DAY: Choice of routes for this day depends on total time available for the trip. If time is limited, leave the Rattlesnake Creek Trail before the descent into Kern Canyon. The longer route includes the Kern, with camp at an unimproved site in Upper Funston Meadow where fishing is often excellent. Rainbow trout here measure 10 to 18 inches.

At the start of the descent into Kern Canyon the pack stock is turned loose briefly to find safe footing over jump-offs. The trail presents no problem for hikers. At the Willow Creek Cut-off to the Big Arroyo Trail, a fire control swath leads to Rattlesnake Point (there are snakes) which affords a magnificent view of the sheer walls and fern-shadowed depths of Kern Canyon. This geologically new trench was cut rapidly into the floor of an old valley after the fourth and latest uplift of the Sierra.

It is worth while to spend an extra day at Funston Meadows. Beaver, not common in the Sierra, are at work here, their engineering feats gradually inundating a portion of the meadows. Side trips upstream a few miles, include a visit to Chagoopa Falls and the nearby ranger station. Another mile upstream, the Kern Hot Spring offers inspiration for a bath.

3RD TRAVELLING DAY: The shorter route gradually ascends the Big Arroyo, skirting the weathered buttresses of the Kaweah Peaks, to camp at Little Five Lakes. Here, sunset and alpineglow on the avalanche flared walls of the Black Kaweah make magificent pictures.

Off to the high country
Photo by Pat Adler

If the start is from Funston Meadows, the day's travel may included two of the most picturesque scenes of the high country — Moraine Lake and Sky Parlor Meadow. The lake lies in a little valley carved by a side thrust of the prehistoric Big Arroyo glacier which, in retreating, left concentric moraine loops. The last of these encircles the lower end of the lake. The Chagoopa Plateau is crossed to a campsite on the Big Arroyo. This is the best base for ascents and explorations in the Kaweahs.

NOTE: These peaks present some technical difficulty and should not be attempted by hikers without proper training and equipment.

4TH OR 5TH TRAVELLING DAY: Starting from Little Five Lakes, the route climbs to Black Rock Pass (11,400) and then drops steeply to a shaded campsite at Pinto Lake. The return route is the same regardless of the rate of travel. The most rewarding side trip is to Big Five Lakes basin, two miles southeast of Little Five Lakes.

5TH OR 6TH TRAVELLING DAY: From Pinto Lake the trail drops to the canyon of Cliff Creek. The far walls are striking, particularly when snow emphasizes the deep flutings of their parallel avalanche chutes. Less striking but of interest geologically is the huge medial moraine at the confluence of Cliff Creek and the stream from Timber Gap. Angular blocks of granite were brought down Cliff Creek by the glacier that carved the stairstep basins of Columbine, Cyclamen, and Spring lakes here. These dammed up the tributary glacier and forced it to swing westward. The trail makes a corresponding detour, then climbs the 2000 feet into Timber Gap through aisles of bracken fern shaded by yellow pine and incense cedar.

With every gain in elevation, more of the spectacular Alta Peak country comes into view, looking northward. From Timber Gap, the lowest pass into Mineral King valley, it is a quick descent over broad avalanche tracks forested ridges and, with home in sight, the last switchbacks through the chaparral.

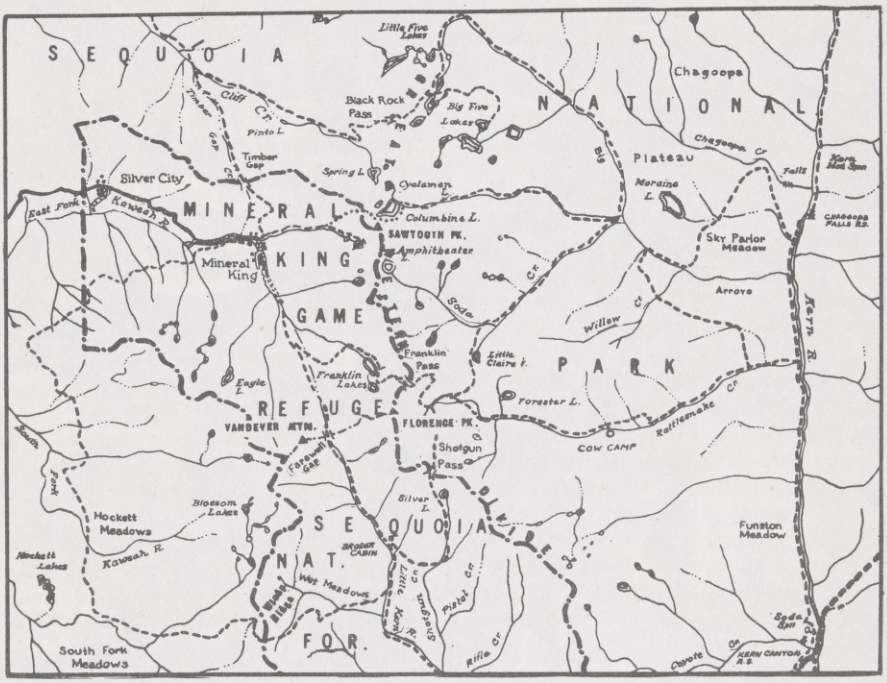
SILVER LAKE — SHOTGUN PASS PACK TRIP — in three traveling days, a swing through the deer-hunting country of the Little Kern and across a white granite moonscape into the forests of the big Kern drainage.

South out of Mineral King, the Game Refuge boundary is crossed at Farewell Gap. As the trail descends the rim of the Little Kern basin it gives a broad overlook of the hunting region, ridge after ridge, with the intervening streams named, appropriately, Shotgun, Pistol and Rifle. In a little meadow at the junction of the Bullfrog Lakes trail, Bowder's cabin has been a landmark since the '80s. Little more than the weathered log walls remain of the old prospector's handiwork. Camp the first night is at Silver Lake, sometimes called Shotgun Lake (10,800), where rainbow trout are plentiful, though not large.

From Silver Lake the trail climbs to Shotgun Pass (11,800). Ranger Lake, barren of fish, lies in a small meadow, but its steep slopes of disintegrated granite above are nearly devoid of vegetation. The beauty of their contours is as various as the changes of light — they act as a foil for dawn, reflect the noon sun unmercifully, and reveal fantastic forms by moonlight.

At Shotgun Pass the whole spectacular Whitney Crest is in view and, near at hand the eastern buttresses of the Great Western Divide. Between the two ranges are remnants of ancient plateaus furrowed by deep gorges. The trail descends to the nearest of these plateau surfaces, a flat rock bench crossed by the narrow canyon of Rattlesnake Creek.

The return is by way of the Franklin Pass trail.



PACK ROUTES TO THE BACK COUNTRY.

Rock Climbing

A geologist might find basis for comparison between Mineral King and another glacier valley — Yosemite — but rockclimbers will see no comparison. The crumbling metamorphic and old sedimentary formations are just not climber's rock. There are some easy practice pitches on granite above the Cold Springs Campground. Climbs might be worked out at White Chief and Eagle Lakes where granite has been sheared by glacial cirque-building, but these granites are closely jointed and it is a long haul from camp for run-of-the-mill possibilities. The peaks of Mineral King all involve only non-technical climbing.

Smith House
8000 Feet
Mt Whitney
14497 Ft.
Forrell Gap
10600 Feet
Eagle Lake
Sawtooth
13825 Feet
monarch lake
U. S POSTOFFIC

Facilities

THE ROAD-

Twenty-five miles of winding road, narrow in places, climbing 6600 feet through warm foothill country, puts Mineral King in the category of out-of-the-way places. It is by no means inaccessible. Over the years the original wagon track has been widened, and the lower portion has an oiled surface, as well as the stretch past the cabins of Silver City. The present oil-surfaced portion is usually open from May to October.

From US 99, turn east on California 198, drive 37 miles, through Visalia, Lemon-Cove and Three Rivers, to the Mineral King road at Hammond (unincorporated), a few miles below the Ash Mountain entrance to Sequoia National Park.

OAK GROVE- telephone and water	0.0 miles	1145 feet
ORIOLE LODGE JUNCTION - truck trail, left, to summer homes and Milk Ranch Pk. Lookout. Arrangements to visit the look-out must be made with the Chief Ranger, Ash Mountain Headquarters.	7.5	2704
SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY	10.0	4500
COLD SPRING- water	10.3	4650
LOOKOUT POINT- fireguard cabin, water	11.2	4800
FLAPJACK CREEK- water	15.0	5300
CONIFER CLUB, private land	18.0	6500
ATWELL'S MILL RANGER STATION- old sawmill site, trail to Hockett Mdws. Telephone. Wilderness Permits. Public campground, toilets, picnic tables.	19.5	6445
CABIN COVE- National park boundary, re-enter Sequoia National Forest.	20.2	6700

Early Mineral King postoffice
Bruton Peterson collection

SILVER CITY- store, cabins, cafe, gasoline, telephone. Summer homes.

MINERAL KING 25.0 7830

ROAD-END-

The old store and lodge have been burned and destroyed and absolutely no facilities are available, except for a public telephone. The store site is now the property of the Disney Cooperation, but public parking is usually permitted. This is the start for many trail trips. A pack station is located across the creek, continue straight ahead just before reaching the bridge. No public parking there.

CAMPING-

Forest Service campgrounds-

COLD SPRING- 26 camp sites (fee), tables, tables, toilets. Located across the stream from the ranger station.

SUNNY POINT- 5 sites, reached by a side road right from the road end. (Road is rough, water only from the stream.)

There are few rules - no dogs, firearms, or disturbing of natural features within the National Park boundaries. No firearms in the Game Refuge, except by licensed hunters during special deer seasons. Fire permits are required on the back trails, but not in the two above established campgrounds. Wilderness Permits required in the backcountry camps of Sequoia National Park (see below). Camping is limited to 14 days, or as posted.

Otherwise — the maxims of prudence: be careful of all fires, hike with companions, be sure that someone knows your destination and plans, suspend all food out of reach of bears. Alcohol and altitude mix to a potent cocktail — use with discretion. Avoid what might create a hazard for the next fellow, such as fish gutting or otherwise contaminating streams and lakes. It has become an accepted practice in the mountains to bring out the artifacts of civilization, the bits of paper, plastic, metal, especially aluminum foil, which gleams along forever.

SKIING-

No facilities are available at Mineral King during the winter months— the only road is blocked by the first heavy snows – yet the valley's spectaculr ski terrian draws the adventurous. To those for whom it is accessible, it is a silent, white country of unscarred snow surfaces wher every rock and tree profile takes on dramatic sharpness. Skiing proficiency is perhaps less important than mountaineering experience in safely visiting the snowscapes of the valley. There are formidable descents, but also many easy downhill runs and miles of very excellent cross-crountry touring.

Wilderness Permits

Wilderness permits are required for overnight visits to the backcountry of Sequoia National Park. This means that it is necessary to have a permit if you wish to go east or north from Mineral King. Permits may be reserved by phone, until July 1st; then must be obtained on a first-come, first-served basis. These may be obtained (6am-9pm) at Atwell Mill Ranger Station, or at Ash Mountain. [However, there is a single ranger at Atwell, who may be away on another duty -- so it is suggested that the permit be obtained at Ash Mountain — if you explain your need, entry may be made without paying the Park fee at the gate.]

Permits are limited — Timber Gap, 50; Sawtooth Pass, 25; Tar Gap, 50; Franklin Pass, 30; Shotgun Pass, 25; (1974 figures). These figures are for the daily limit of passes to be issued.

Mineral King Camping and Vehicle Special Area

While the USFS is apparently willing to have some two millions of visitors a year, if they come to enjoy the proposed amusement park-ski resort proposed by the Disney complex, they now maintain very strict regulations on the public use of Mineral King at the present time.

While there is no posted regulations on the number of visitors, there is certainly a post-facto limit, since parking is limited to a relatively few number of cars. In this Special Use Area, cars may only be parked the area shown on the following map, according to these rules —

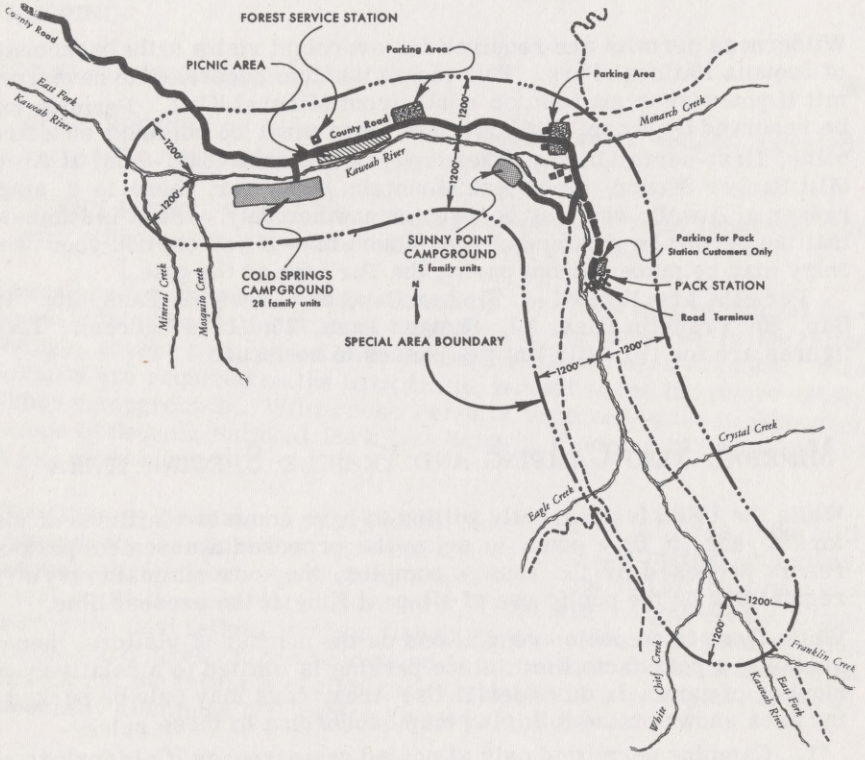
"1. Camping permitted only at posted campgrounds (Cold Springs and Sunny Point) and limited to one family per developed camp unit. Group camping is prohibited.

"2. Picnicking only is permitted in posted picnic sites. Occupancy is

not allowed between 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.

"3. Motor vehicle use is permitted only on the County road, designated parking areas and picnic roads, and roads and parking areas in the recreational residence tracts. Parking in designated posted areas, except the recreational residence tract, is limited to seven days maximum.

While not explicit in the above Regulation, this forbids any parking along the highway in this Special Area, and violators are cited. This also makes any extended back pack trip of extended duration impossible unless one parks below the banned area and arranges a car shuttle or is willing to put up with a long walk along the paved road in addition to the proposed backcountry trek.



POSTSCRIPT

On December 30, 1974, the USFS released its draft of an environmental impact study for Mineral King. It was definitely oriented towards an amusement park development. At the entrance to Mineral King Valley would be a 25-acre village. This would provide lodging for 6000 persons, restaurants with seating capacity of 2350, and campsites for 1325. Plans provide for a daily 10,000 visitors, winter and summer, with an annual visitation of almost three million. In addition there would be provisions for the multitude of service personal, as well as facilities for people servicing: medical, information, recreation (?), etc. Additional facilities are planned for Faculty Flat, adjoining the Valley development.

A plethora of 18 ski lifts is planned for the complete development, which would accommodate the entire 10,000 expected visitors. These would occupy four major bowls, three to be located in the basins of Eagle Lake, Mosquito Lakes and White Chief Lake, while the fourth would be in the draw of Farewell Gap. A cafe and warming hut is planned for Eagle Crest, which divides the White Chief and Eagle basins. Another would be built on Miners Ridge, near the lower Mosquito Lakes.

All of this calls for a massive transportation system. This would be based on an improved two-lane highway between the Hammond junction, near Three Rivers and a gigantic parking facility at Oak Grove, 6.6 miles above the main highway junction. Here would be constructed a multi-tier parking structure, covering 35 acres and providing parking for 3600 cars. From here on, access would be via a closed system—provided by the Disney Corp., undoubtedly at a nice profit. Two plans were suggested, a cog-assisted railway at $53,800,000 (1974 prices), or a combination bus-rail system, which would use diesel buses up to Silver City, then transferring to a small cog train at Silver City. This has a current price tag of only $12,000,000. All plans for such construction call for public assistance in the funding, in addition to a bill for $3,000,000 for the improvement of the highway to Oak Grove.

In addition to the dollars-and-cents price tag, 284 acres of vegetation and wildlife habitat of an additional 517 acres must be included in the total cost of this proposed amusement park.

However it is doubtful if this plan will have an easy time in the current crunching situation of increasing environmental awareness and the tight money market. MCA's resort-complex plans for Yosemite were turned down and a new study ordered. The impact of the Disney operation on fragile Mineral King would be even more intense that that rejected at Yosemite. The Sierra Club and other environmental-minded organizations promise to continue their fight to preserve the remaining wilderness of the little Mineral King enclave.

Plate 1. Mount Whitney from Trail Crest.

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White Chief Ridge
photo by Bruton Peterson

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Pat Adler divides her time between her explorations into the mountain reaches of the Sierra and researching California history. She serves as researcher for the Cultural Heritage Board of Los Angeles and has written a number of books and articles in these fields.

Here ia a guide book to Mineral King, the most fabulous of all 'Sierra alcoves'. Pat Adler tells of the history, the early mining boom, and of the ecology and the geology. Detailed trail guides tell of the Valley trails and of the routes to the High Country. Written in a friendly but informative style, it is a book that all lovers of and visitors to Mineral King should have.

The end of 1965 marked the opening of a new phase in the status of Mineral King. The Walt Disney Enterprises, who had bought up all of the private holdings in Mineral King Valley, was selected by the US FS to develop a year-round recreation facility in the little valley. To the dismay of lovers of this remote enclave, they came up with a grand multi-million dollar amusement park-ski resort proposal, planning for over two million visitors a year.

This resulted in a series of court battles, during which the status of Mineral King remained in limbo. The Forest Service phased out all of the more primitive campgrounds and at any opportunity cancelled many of the cabin leases. On the other hand, the number of backpackers did increase, and this coupled with hiking permits and limited parking has put a real crunch on the opportunity for outdoor activities.

Here in this revision is to be found the story of the struggle, as well as the latest information on rules and regulations.

$1.50

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